DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 660 CG 019 199

AUTHOR Green, Karen Reed; Baker, Andrea
TITLE Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth in the Northwest Region: Initial Search.
INSTITUTION Northwest Regional Educational Lab., Portland, OR. Education and Work Program.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 1 Jun 86
NOTE 52p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrator Attitudes; Curriculum Design; *Dropout Prevention; Educational Methods; *High Risk Students; High Schools; Middle Schools; *Potential Dropouts; *Program Effectiveness; Secondary Education; Staff Role
IDENTIFIERS *United States (Northwest)

ABSTRACT

This is a progress report for a project attempting to gather and share information about effective dropout prevention strategies in action at the middle school and high school levels around the Northwest region of the United States. Introductory material reviews current views of the dropout problem, recent reports which address the issue of high-risk youth from a national perspective, and characteristics of high-risk youth. The bulk of this report focuses on identifying characteristics of effective practices for this population of potential dropouts. A literature review shows that there is no widely accepted set of evaluation criteria for judging the effectiveness of specific strategies. The paper discusses the work of Gary Wehlage and other researchers to reduce school attrition, state and city school districts' dropout prevention program characteristics, and regional efforts. Also described are the findings from a questionnaire sent to administrators to identify successful programs their schools have used with high-risk youth. The effective programs share the following common characteristics. (1) a qualified, caring staff; (2) a relevant, meaningful curriculum based on real-life experiences and goals; (3) individualized instruction with low student/teacher ratio; and (4) the support and commitment of administrators. This list of successful program characteristics will be refined and incorporated into a checklist of strategies and related outcomes that are common to programs serving at-risk youth. A bibliography and copy of the questionnaire are included. (ABL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED271660

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH IN THE NORTHWEST REGION: INITIAL SEARCH

Karen Reed Green
Andrea Baker

Promising Practices for High Risk Youth
Education and Work Program

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204
(503)248-6800

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

June 1, 1986

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Terry D. Kirkpatrick
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 019199

The research on which this report is based was supported by a contract from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI), U.S. Department of Education. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement, and no official endorsement by the OERI should be inferred.

For permission to distribute this report beyond OERI and NWREL staff, contact Karen Reed Green or Andrea Baker, Education and Work Program, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction 1

The Dropout Problem 2

Recent Reports 5

Why Review Promising Practices? 9

Characteristics of High-Risk Youth 11

Characteristics of Promising Practices 16

Surveys of Effective Programs 17

State and City Summaries of Successful Program Characteristics 23

Studies within the Region 26

Summary of Common Characteristics 33

Initial Survey of Promising Practices in the Region 34

Project Plans 42

References 44

Appendix A 49

Letter 51

Survey Questionnaire 53

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH
IN THE NORTHWEST REGION: INITIAL SEARCH

Introduction

This Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) project, Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth, aims to facilitate the job of policymakers and teachers who are concerned about serving the growing number of children who are at risk of dropping out of school. The project is gathering and sharing information about effective dropout prevention strategies in action at the middle school and high school levels around the Northwest region. A wide range of strategies will be included, from full-fledged district- or statewide programs to classroom practices devised, implemented and improved by seasoned teachers in individual classrooms.

This progress report represents the project's initial efforts (1) to identify the key characteristics of strategies and programs that effectively engage high-risk students in the education process, and (2) to begin to identify promising practices throughout the region which can serve as examples for others to emulate. After reviewing current views of the dropout problem and recent reports which address the issue of high-risk youth from a national perspective, we briefly describe the characteristics of the marginal students who are the target of dropout prevention efforts. The bulk of the report then focuses on identifying the characteristics of effective practices for this population. We have approached this from two different perspectives -- from that of the literature on the education of high-risk youth and from the perspective of practitioners in the region who are already actively involved in

solving the problem on a day-to-day basis. We report here the results of a regional survey of teachers and administrators in effective programs for high-risk youth.

The Dropout Problem

One in four young people in the United States does not graduate from high school. In some large cities, the dropout rates are at least double that: In New York City in 1984 40% failed to graduate, in Chicago 49%, in Los Angeles 55% and in Miami 60% ("Dropouts: Shocking Enough to Get Our Attention" 1985: 1). In-depth studies of the problem in inner city schools calculate the loss of students to be even higher (e.g., Fine 1986:395). In a society which has long prided itself on the value of education and on the validity of the national goal of a high school diploma for each young person, these statistics, coupled with declining test scores, have caused a national reaction of near crisis proportions.

Concern over dropouts and at-risk children is not new. But a number of issues combine to make the current situation of particular concern. The cost to society in terms of potential cognitive development and productivity of its citizens has long been an issue, but many consider it even more critical in today's complex and changing technological society. Numerous reports have documented the differences in high school graduates' and dropouts' cognitive skills (McDill, Natriello, & Pallas 1986). A price can hardly be placed on the value of adequate personal development and preparation for leading a fulfilling and rewarding life. The cost to the nation in curtailed production and creativity, however, can be somewhat more concretely estimated. At a time when declining birthrates foretell a smaller pool of potential employees, the nation's economic growth is demanding higher numbers of entry-level workers.

Business leaders are increasingly worried about the rising school dropout rates and identification of high percentages of marginal students who are either at risk of dropping out or who will graduate with substandard skills. If current trends continue, businesses will soon be relying on these marginally prepared young people to form the ranks of their new employees (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985:17).

The monetary costs to the dropouts and to the nation have been documented through employment statistics and earnings. Not only do dropouts experience higher rates of unemployment, but they also tend to earn less throughout their lives (Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission 1985:15; McDill, Natriello & Pallas 1986:154-155). Since many students who leave high school without a degree come from families who also have had a limited number of years of education and have experienced higher rates of unemployment and lower earnings, the failure of the schools and society to meet the educational needs of these children is contributing to the continuation of established cycles of poverty. The economic costs to the nation in foregone earnings and higher utilization of services such as welfare, unemployment compensation and other social services have been estimated to be far higher than the costs of innovative programs to retain children in school through high school. Other social costs are related to unfinished educations: Dropouts are more likely to be involved in delinquent behavior and criminal activity.

A cost to society implied in the preceding is the sacrifice of equity. As we have become more aware of the diversity of educational needs among children and the differences in individual learning styles

and paces, we have also taken on increased responsibility to address those needs and differences for all children equally. Equity in education has been a target of policymakers and practitioners for several decades. However, the growing concern over the state of education in the nation (fired by the National Commission on Excellence in Education's 1983 report, A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform) has spawned a powerful movement nationwide to reform the educational system to foster excellence. This, curiously enough, has brought the issue of equity to the forefront once again. In the rush to encourage and achieve excellence in our nation's schooling, the plight of the nearly one million students who drop out of school each year seemed to have slipped by the wayside initially. In the past year or two, fears have been voiced about the possibility that the excellence movement may have discriminatory effects on the education of at-risk children (many of whom are minority children). This possibility will be discussed further below.

There is another economic reason that the rising dropout rate is currently receiving considerable attention: increased controversy over the sources of school revenues (especially with regard to individual property taxes) and declining school enrollments (due to demographic trends) which in turn cause declines in school revenues. Not only for the sake of the nation's future, but for the immediate future of individual schools, teachers and administrators, schools must meet society's and students' expectations of adequate and appropriate education or suffer losses in income and eventually in jobs (Wenlage 1983:16-17).

For these and other reasons dropouts and high-risk students have become a priority topic.

Recent Reports

In the two years following the release of Our Nation at Risk, several national reports have come out to address both the issue of excellence and of equity. In 1983, the National Coalition of Advocates for Students commissioned an independent Board of Inquiry to conduct public hearings in 10 cities around the country to investigate the status of at-risk children in public schools. The results of the year-long study, which heard testimony from students, dropouts, parents, teachers, and other concerned citizens and which also conducted a review of recent research, were published in January 1985 in Barriers to Excellence: Our Children at Risk (National Coalition of Advocates for Students 1985; see also Cardenas and First 1985). The report deals with various forms of discrimination and differential treatment, specific barriers to educational excellence for all children (such as inflexible school structures, abuses of tracking, misuses of testing), and problems of inequitable and insufficient school funding.

The approach of the Board of Inquiry was to examine the problems of young people who are not being adequately served by their schools and to determine the changes needed. Although the Board heard testimony of positive changes being made, the state of public education for at-risk children was found to be sorely lacking and in even greater jeopardy in light of the current education reform movement's emphasis on higher standards. Based on its findings, the Board made a series of wide-ranging recommendations.

In 1984, the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) conducted a survey of states' use of demographic data for educational planning and found that as of that year no state had passed "reform" legislation that contained specific plans to provide for students who did not meet the higher standards. As the IEL report, All One System: Demographics of Education -- Kindergarten Through Graduate School, states, "...thus, almost all states were willing to have a higher dropout rate from secondary schools in their state, even though the economic (leaving out the social) costs of this position will be very high indeed" (Hodgkinson 1985:12). In 1985, several states did show some responsiveness to the need to provide additional help to students who were at-risk even before educational reforms raised the standards. The IEL survey found widespread concern over the likely increase in "pushouts" due to reform legislation. In the section on retention of students through high school graduation, the report comments on useful dropout prevention strategies and suggests some steps for dealing with potential high school dropouts and their right to an equal education.

In July of 1985, the National Governors' Association (NGA) expressed its concern about high-risk youth ages 16-21 in their report, The Five-Year Dilemma. The NGA Employment and Training Subcommittee explored what is being done and can be done to prepare youth for work and expand their employment opportunties. The report placed special empnasis on the need for collaborative solutions in which educators, employment trainers, and employers coordinate efforts in programs targeted at this age group.

Who's Looking Out for At-Risk Youth appeared in the fall of 1985. This report, prepared for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation by MDC, Inc., presents the results of a survey of 54 state educational excellence

commissions in 32 states. The focus of the survey was to determine whether or not the educational excellence commissions established since the 1983 Our Nation at Risk report have paid attention to the at-risk youth who may make up as high as one-third of all high school students. The answer MDC received was no. Only 15 commissions (27% of the respondents) in 12 states had even one recommendation aimed at a group that could be described as at-risk youth (MDC, Inc. 1985). The report goes on to discuss the work of those 15 commissions and makes recommendations for states to deal specifically with the educational problems of at-risk students.

Also in the fall of 1985, the Council of Great City Schools released a report of a survey of secondary school superintendents and principals conducted for them by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. The survey investigated the status of secondary school improvement efforts which have taken place since 1983. Although the report did not document the effects of higher standards on disadvantaged students, it did note that increased graduation requirements were likely to bring increased numbers of dropouts as those requirements were applied to newly entering ninth-grade students. Approximately half the school districts surveyed said their improvement efforts were aimed at potential "school leavers" and disadvantaged students. However, a third reported having no systematic procedure for identifying potential dropouts (Council of Great City Schools 1985).

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) also issued a report in 1985: With Consequences for All, A Report from the ASCD Task Force on Increased High School Graduation Requirements. While recognizing the need for reform in our educational system, the ASCD

noted, "There remains, however, the disquieting possibility that these added requirements will prove counterproductive for substantial numbers of students, and thus ultimately for society," and concluded that many currently borderline students may drop out of school earlier and in greater numbers.

And as a result of school reform the Business Advisory Commission of the Education Commission of the States felt compelled to address the needs of "...those who, despite or because of school reform, are at greater risk of being lost to society as productive individuals." Recognizing the problem of large numbers of alienated youth and concerned with the need to teach the virtues of civic responsibility, the ECS Business Advisory Commission published a report, Reconnecting Youth: The Next Stage of Reform, which suggests ways that the business community can collaborate with policymakers and educators to improve opportunities for all youth and reconnect at-risk youth with adults and the worlds of work and responsible citizenship.

In addition to these national policy-oriented reports, several educational journals have recently dedicated entire issues to discussion of the dropout problem and the need for striving for excellence for all students. The September 1985 issue of Educational Leadership carried 19 specialized articles under the general title "Success for All Students." And the entire Spring 1986 issue of the Teachers College Record is dedicated to careful consideration of patterns and policies regarding school dropouts. Educational policy, practice and research journals and newsletters frequently carry special reports on the state of dropout statistics and on the need for dropout prevention efforts.

Why Review Promising Practices?

Despite all of the attention to the national crisis of increasing numbers of at-risk students who fall through the cracks in our educational system, we have little information about what is actually being done to reverse this trend. As Dale Mann notes, "We have better national descriptions of youth at risk than we have local descriptions of programs that work" (1986a:68). This may be because, as MDC, Inc., concludes, ". . . at-risk youth do not yet figure seriously in this nation's plans to achieve educational excellence" (1985:15). It does not mean, however, that few people are working with high-risk youth. Mann points out that there is an astonishing array of things being done that are considered helpful to dropout prevention, but very little is being learned about effective methods to address the problem because so little research has been done to evaluate specific interventions in terms of effects.

In considering what other types of educational reforms should take place to avoid increased dropout rates as a result of the implementation of higher standards, Hamilton was surprised to find only a small number of reports on dropout prevention programs and even fewer that included both program descriptions and data confirming program effectiveness (1986:413). Our own literature search revealed a similar paucity of documentation on effective dropout prevention strategies.

Many have identified the need for more information on specific interventions and for greater sharing of such information. To cite Hodgkinson, of the Institute for Educational Leadership, "Given the basically local nature of such dropout prevention programs, there exists

a major need to coordinate and share information on what works and why" (1985:12). In our interactions with teachers and educational policymakers throughout the Northwest region, we have heard numerous reiterations of this need; many local educators are deeply concerned about finding ways to serve their high-risk students and they want to learn from others' practical experiences.

This report describes the initial efforts of the Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth Project to identify effective strategies for teaching high-risk youth. Via an ERIC search and literature review, information has been collected on the dropout phenomenon and on the characteristics of effective programs that serve youth at risk of joining the ranks of school dropouts. To begin to identify promising practices within the region, local educational conferences on serving high-risk youth were attended and information on specific programs was collected. A brief questionnaire was distributed to all middle, junior high and high school principals, county/educational service district superintendents, and school district superintendents in the six states in the region and to local alternative education conference participants (see Appendix A). The questionnaire -- which was to be passed on to individuals directly involved in teaching at-risk young people -- was the vehicle for gathering initial information on the dropout prevention activities underway in the region's schools. Selections from the literature review are discussed and the results of the survey are reported below.

Characteristics of High-Risk Youth

Much has been written about dropout rates and the characteristics of students who leave school. The focus of this project is on dropout prevention strategies. To identify and understand such strategies one must have a clear definition of the target population, i.e., the potential dropouts. Therefore, we will briefly review the characteristics of dropouts and students at risk of dropping out before discussing programs designed to help them stay in school.

There are many terms for describing the students with whom we are concerned here: high-risk, at-risk, marginal, potential dropout, disadvantaged, discouraged, defeated. Our purpose is not to select the ultimate definition, but rather to summarize the characteristics that are generally considered to be highly correlated with leaving school. Based on dropout research, one can assume that descriptions of students who have actually dropped out provide clues to the characteristics of students who are at risk of doing so.

There is overwhelming agreement that no single factor is more important than any other in predicting who is likely to drop out of school. Most studies agree that dropping out or school is usually the result of a combination of student-related factors: background characteristics, academic achievement, and behaviors and attitudes. More important, there is general consensus that dropping out is not necessarily related to intelligence; children of all levels of ability and intelligence drop out of school.

The best and most recent national data available for learning about the dropout problem come from the High School and Beyond (HS&B) study, a longitudinal study sponsored by the National Center for Educational

Statistics (NCES) and consisting of a survey of nearly 60,000 students (sophomores and seniors) in 1980 and then a follow-up survey in 1982 of a subsample of the original group (Peng & Takai 1983). Studies prior to that work had identified the following dropout characteristics: low socioeconomic status, membership in an ethnic or racial minority group (generally related to socioeconomic status), unsatisfactory relationship with family, low academic achievement, dissatisfaction with school, delinquent or truant behavior, low self-esteem, enrollment in a nonacademic curriculum, need to work, and early pregnancy and marriage (Beck & Muia 1980; Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock 1986; Rumberger 1983). Results of initial High School and Beyond analyses generally supported those earlier findings and provided some additional information. Type of school, region of the country, and community type were also found to be significant factors. Dropouts were more likely to be from public schools (rather than private Catholic schools), from the Western or Southern regions of the country, and from large urban areas (Peng & Takai 1983).

A team of researchers from the Educational Testing Service (ETS) also scrutinized the HS&B data to determine how the cognitive achievement and attitudes of high school dropouts differed from those of teenagers who remained in school (Ekstrom, Goertz, Pollack & Rock 1986). To examine that question they identified the variables critical to dropping out, finding two major variables: school performance, as measured by grades, and extent of problem behavior. They further found that these two variables seemed to be determined at least in part by the home educational support system (mother's educational aspirations for her child, study aids in the home, parental involvement in schooling, etc.).

Two studies in the most populous states in the Northwest region have asked dropouts themselves their reasons for leaving school. The Oregon Department of Education study of early school leavers (1980) interviewed 529 students who left school during the 1979-80 school year. Their primary reasons for leaving (cited in order of frequency) included:

- teachers;
- dislike of school in general;
- credits;
- dislike of specific school;
- boredom/lack of interest;
- desire for alternative educational program/institution; and
- pregnancy.

Students interviewed in a dropout study conducted by the Edmonds, Washington, School District (Gadwa, Christensen, Bryan, & Boeck, 1983) found similar answers:

- teacher alienation or uncaring teachers;
- lack of attendance;
- problems at home;
- school being boring; and
- personal problems.

These differed slightly from the reasons for leaving stated by dropouts in the HS&B study, where family pressures and the need to work were also important factors:

Boys' reasons:

- poor grades;
- disliked school;
- took a job;
- couldn't get along with teachers;
- had to support family;
- expelled/suspended.

Girls' reasons:

- marriage;
- disliked school;
- poor grades;
- pregnancy;
- offered a job;
- couldn't get along with teachers.*

Some of these reasons for leaving school are things on which schools and teachers may have little impact (for example, background characteristics such as family socioeconomic status or student/family relationships). School districts in general have such limited resources that even if they were able to influence those factors, they would not have the resources to devote to investigating such student background characteristics. As O'Connor (1985) points out, as a practical matter schools must focus on characteristics that they can realistically monitor. The following marginal student characteristics cited by Wehlage (1983) are indicators the schools can easily identify:

- typically in the bottom 25% of the class as measured by grade point average;
- frequently have failed some courses;
- behind on credits to graduate;
- lack of basic skills (among some); and
- attitude and conduct problems.

Among the problems marginal students have, truancy is the most significant according to Wehlage.

*Reponses for all of these studies are listed in order of frequency.

O'Connor lists truancy and having low grades and being behind in credits as the main characteristics to use to identify students at risk. He cites a Eugene, Oregon, study by Schellenberg (1985) which found that absenteeism in the 9th grade was a strong predictor of students at risk of dropping out.

Wehlage and Rutter (1986a) have recently gone beyond the traditional orientation of dropout investigations which focuses on the characteristics of the dropout as deviant. Using the High School and Beyond data, they examine dropouts' perceptions of the schools for clues regarding the role of the schools in the creation of dropouts. Although they find that socioeconomic status and school performance are important variables in determining who drops out, in their analyses these variables are less powerful than students' perceptions about teacher interest in students, the effectiveness of discipline and the fairness of school discipline. Wehlage and Rutter suggest that the phenomenon of school dropout is better conceived and can be better addressed if it is viewed as a result of a combination of certain student characteristics with certain school conditions. The implications of this conclusion for the development of effective schooling for at-risk students will be discussed further below. The point here is that alienation from teachers and the school is a common characteristic among students who drop out.

Another recent study questioned the strength of the influence of student background, particularly home environment, on the likelihood a student will drop out of school. Sexton (1985) analyzed dropout rates in Portland, Oregon, by school and residential area and found that school leaving was far more highly correlated with the school attended than with the student's residential area. His analysis of outcomes among students

who had been forced to transfer due to school closures was particularly insightful. Dropout rates of students from particular neighborhoods were cut in half after they entered different schools. Socioeconomic status and home environment were far less influential on school retention than was the school attended. These findings do not deny the influence of student background characteristics, but illustrate the potential of schools to overcome such influence and reduce the loss of students.

The profile of a high-risk student that emerges from these various studies, then, includes the following characteristics:

- poor academic achievement (low grades, behind in credits or -- at the middle school level -- behind grade level, older);
- behavior problems, especially truancy, but also including disciplinary problems, attitude, alienation from teachers and the school, substance abuse; and
- non-school problems, including unsatisfactory family relations, need to work, pregnancy.

Characteristics of Promising Practices

Our review of the literature on working with high-risk youth uncovered some isolated program descriptions and a handful of review articles and guidelines for setting up dropout prevention programs. Rather than describe specific programs from other parts of the country, here we will summarize the literature in terms of the characteristics thought to contribute to effective dropout intervention and then compare them to results from our initial survey of practices in schools in the Northwest region.

There appears to be no clear-cut, widely accepted set of evaluation criteria for judging the effectiveness of specific strategies. The bottom line for judging the worth of a program of course usually includes

a combination of the following: reduction in dropout rate, reduction in attendance and behavior problems, and improved achievement (as measured through credit completion, GPA, test scores, etc.). But many programs lack sufficient funds or longitudinal data even to evaluate their efforts systematically on that basis. Beyond these obvious goals, few studies indeed have tried to link outcomes to specific strategies. The noteworthy exception to this is the work of Gary Wehlage and his colleagues at the recently created National Center on Effective Secondary Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. This work will be discussed further below.

In his call for action on the dropout problem, Dale Mann (1986b) describes what he terms the "blizzard" of approaches, the lack of agreement on outcome measures, and the consequent dirth of evidence on "what works." He points out the need for some kind of taxonomy -- some framework -- that can categorize differences among programs which may be related to differences in outcomes. He also goes on to illustrate, however, the difficulty of setting up such a framework, noting that considering just in-school programs, a dozen school districts were using 63 of the 71 identified possible approaches to dropout prevention and/or remediation. It should come as no surprise, then, that nearly every article and report we reviewed had a somewhat different list of characteristics of successful intervention programs. Only a few even attempted to organize their lists into general categories.

Surveys of Effective Programs

Gary Wenlage and his colleagues in Wisconsin have been studying ways to reduce school attrition for a number of years. In 1983, Wenlage presented some guidelines for effective programs for marginal high school

students, described six different programs in Wisconsin, and then generalized to describe the common characteristics that contribute to success with students. He noted that approaches vary, depending upon what people think is "wrong." Many programs stress development of basic skills; others focus on specific vocational skills; still others emphasize preparation for the world of work (socialization of proper attitudes and work habits, career counseling, work experience).

Wehlage feels none of these approaches is successful enough to be the primary basis of program planning. Instead, he takes a much broader view, stating that the problem to be addressed by programs for marginal students is really adolescent development. Within that broad rubric, he identifies two major areas on which to focus efforts: (1) social bonding (the positive attachment to parents and other significant adults which leads to the commitment to participate in the institutions of society; and (2) intellectual growth (the development of abstract thinking, rather than simply basic skills). There are a number of program characterstics that when present help to foster growth in these two areas. Beyond the assumption that there is no substitute for quality teachers, Wehlage identifies the following characteristics of effective programs, organized into four categories:

Administration and organization:

- small size (25-60 students, 2-6 teachers) -- allows flexibility, responsiveness to individual needs, frequent face-to-face interactions among faculty and with students;
- program autonomy (own name, space and administrative staff) -- gives teachers ownership and power to be effective.

Teacher culture:

- professional accountability for student success;
- extended role -- work with whole student, demonstrate caring;

- optimism regarding success, but realistic judgments of individual academic abilities;
- collegiality -- teamwork, joint decision-making, sharing in successes, group activities;
- professionally rewarding.

Student culture:

- family atmosphere -- accepting, but not uncritical, genuinely caring;
- cooperative learning -- not competitive;
- supportive peer culture (regarding the school, rules, goals, progress).

Curriculum and instruction:

- individualized;
- cooperative;
- use of real-life problems;
- experiential -- involvement in community service, career internships, political/social action, community study, outdoor adventure.

Wehlage goes into some detail about the utility of experiential curriculum for fostering adolescent development, concluding that if properly designed it is an essential component of any program for marginal students.

Since 1983, Wehlage and his associates have been working toward designing a model program for at-risk youth and formulating ways to evaluate its effectiveness (Wehlage & Rutter, 1986b). They believe that program success can (and should) be evaluated on the basis of both visible criteria such as reduced dropout rate, less frequent truancy and disruptive behavior and improved competencies in basic skills, and on such less tangible things as improved self-esteem, increased locus of

control and perception of opportunities, greater degree of social bonding, and participation in the shared values of society. To accomplish this they have developed the "Wisconsin Youth Survey," an instrument to measure the personal orientations of at-risk students. They have used the instrument to gather data at numerous sites and are in the process of revising and refining it. In addition, as part of the research agenda for the new National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, they are identifying schools or programs that have been highly successful with at-risk students. They plan to study six high schools to identify generalizable and replicable program characteristics.

As noted earlier, the work that Wehlage and Rutter have done with the HS&B data (1986a) has added to their vision of what will make programs more effective. They identify three necessary elements:

- an enhanced sense of professional accountability among educators toward all students;
- a renewal of efforts to establish legitimate authority within the institution of the school; and
- a redefinition of school work for students and teachers that will allow more students to achieve success and satisfaction and continue their schooling (pp. 389-90).

There have been several surveys of dropout prevention programs in vocational education. Lotto (1982) describes the characteristics common to 17 such programs for which there was evidence of their holding power. Many of these programs had not been previously described in the literature on dropout prevention. Lotto found these programs had three major characteristics in common:

- Each used a variety of strategies that were well integrated into the program design.
- Potential dropouts were separated from their regular schools and placed in alternative settings.

- Participants comprised a relatively small group on which resources were concentrated.

As they argue for the need to incorporate basic skills remediation into vocational training programs for potential and actual dropouts, Weber and Silvani-Lacey (1983) set up clear categories for their review of 14 programs. They describe four basic approaches to the reinforcement of basic skills and remediation of deficiencies at the secondary level: (1) compensatory or remedial programs; (2) support-oriented programs; (3) alternative school programs; and (4) inservice training programs. They organize the information about programs using these different approaches into three categories: content, methodology and organization. After reviewing the 14 programs, they then make a series of recommendations about effective programs, clustering their suggestions in these three areas.

With regard to <u>content</u> they recommend:

- Have clear and explicit goals and objectives (students need structure).
- Make certain that criteria for judging success correspond directly to the content.

Their <u>methodological suggestions</u> include:

- Identify at-risk students early (in elementary school) and do it as unobtrusively as possible.
- Avoid pejorative terms and labels (e.g., "remedial") -- don't reinforce the caste system.
- Have an integrated program -- combine basic skills with vocational/occupational training to make the program more relevant to students' need to find a job.
- Individualize the instruction.
- Adapt materials to specific needs and/or use a variety of materials and media.
- Include paid work experience and relate job experience to content of schooling.

- Provide incentives (recognition and rewards) to motivate students.

- Use peers to tutor.

- Provide alternative programming (integrate career exploration with vocational and basic skills curriculum, offer flexible schedule, shorter classes, etc.).

Organizational considerations include:

- Provide dual components (presecondary and secondary).

- Present inservice workshops to familiarize teachers with dropouts, their skills levels and effective remedies.

- Foster linkages with other organizations (for example, with apprenticeship and CETA programs for paid work for students).

- Determine optimal mix of staff size and qualifications for both basic skills and vocational instruction.

- Determine optimal mix in provision of support services (for example, number of guidance counselors, working panel of business and community leaders, etc.).

The authors also offer some "other" considerations:

- Locate the program within the school.

- Encourage cooperation between the basic skills and vocational education staff.

- Plan for rigorous assessments of the program to allow better estimates of potential impact.

And they suggest the need for more research on the following topics:

- parental impact;

- complementary basic skills (listening, writing, oral communication and their effects of reading and mathematics; and

- dropouts and vocational outcomes.

To identify indicators of effective vocational programs for dropouts, Batsche and her colleagues (1984) surveyed 76 administrators of exemplary vocational programs that specifically served high school dropouts or potential dropouts. Forty-four responded.

The administrators were asked to rank 16 program descriptors regarding the success of the program. The top four descriptors reported all had to do with affective aspects of the programs:

- o self-concept development;
- o work attitudes/habits;
- o interpersonal/life skills; and
- o motivation.

Descriptors regarding work experience, basic skills, employability and job training skills were also deemed important, but not as important as these affective topics. Among the least important were interagency cooperation, job development, staff upgrading and community service. The authors expressed surprise at these results and warned that the respondents may have found these last factors unnecessary because they are already experiencing a high degree of success (may already have highly qualified staff or ready sources of jobs, for example). The administrators were also asked to rate 12 teaching factors according to importance for retaining dropouts. The top four included:

- o established and clearly communicated rules;
- o clearly communicated performance standards;
- o approachable teachers; and
- o counseling services.

State and City Summaries of Successful Program Characteristics

Several states and major city school districts have put out publications on the dropout problem and ways to deal with it more effectively. As examples we review the characteristics of effective dropout prevention programming identified by New York City Public Schools, where nearly half of the students enrolled drop out before

completing high school; the Minnesota Department of Education, in conjunction with the CETA-Education Linkage Unit; and the Ohio State Department of Education.

The effective features reported by New York City Public Schools (1970:14-15) were identified by a study conducted by the Office of Educational Evaluation to identify the major causes of dropping out of school and ways the school system could respond effectively to the problem. The study, Interrupted Education: Students Who Drop Out, was based on interviews with staff in high school, alternative high school, and auxiliary services, and with students in dropout prevention programs, students who had dropped out and then returned to school, and nonreturning dropouts. According to the study the following features are found in programs and schools that successfully serve potential and actual dropouts:

- caring, skilled counselors, teachers and administrators who believe that their students can learn;
- a commitment from the school leadership that dropout prevention is a priority;
- an instructional program individually tailored to the learning needs and styles of different students and advancing hierarchically through a sequence of skills;
- course offerings that are future goal oriented and that make sense to students in terms of their personal experiences;
- learning goals that can be achieved at the student's own pace in period of time generally less than three weeks;
- job experiences;
- a grading system that builds in success by connecting it to learning tasks set in accordance with students' achievement levels;
- immediate feedback on performance;
- professional counseling supplemented by peer counseling;
- career information that leads to job placement;

- o emphasis on reading improvement and the practical application of mathematics; and

- o a system of discipline that establishes a bottom line for unacceptable behavior, with a minimum of rules, with clear penalties consistently enforced, including rewards for observing rules and flexibility for special circumstances.

After reviewing a variety of dropout prevention programs, both within Minnesota and around the country, with local, state, or federal sponsorship, the Minnesota report Secondary School Dropouts summarizes common characteristics among successful programs (CETA-Education Linkage Unit 1981:57). They often have:

- o two major goals -- development of learning skills and employability competencies;

- o individualized approaches, including ongoing participant assessment, personalized learning activities and remedial basic skills assistance when needed;

- o opportunities to improve attitudes -- such as emphasis on individual strengths rather than weaknesses -- and a chance to develop relationships in new settings away from past problems;

- o a wide variety of support services to enable youth to succeed in the program -- including individual assistance in personal, educational and employment-related needs;

- o a jobs component or another source of income for youth who need money to stay in the program; and

- o a competent, caring staff.

In 1982 and 1983, Ohio conducted two large surveys of school districts and counselors regarding attendance/dropout policies and programs. The results were published in Reducing Dropouts in Ohio Schools: Guidelines and Promising Practices. A Guide to Dropout Prevention, Intervention and Remediation (Ohio State Department of Education 1983). Ohio suggests that although good programs differ from each other in design and content, they usually share nine features.

Successful dropout programs:

- offer student support services (including health care, assistance with drug and alcohol problems, personal counseling, liaison with law enforcement);
- emphasize an individualized, student centered approach (with instruction at the student's own level and pace);
- include basic skills remediation;
- employ community-based learning (using the community as a classroom and using the human and materials resources of the community to supplement individualized instruction;
- provide employment-related activities (career counseling, job training, job placement -- unite the world of work with that of school);
- offer high school credit for alternative courses (help earn diplomas);
- stress interagency cooperation (agenices outside the school can help provide many of the above features);
- provide teacher, administrator and parent support; and
- orient students to success (through positive outcomes, realistic, attainable goals, immediate feedback, focus of improving self-esteem, etc.) (p. 27).

Studies within the Region

Within the Northwest region, state departments of education, local school districts, scholars and community and business leaders have been responding to the increasing concern over school attrition. One of the most comprehensive studies to date is the Edmonds (Washington) School District study on dropouts conducted by Gadwa and her colleagues, mentioned earlier. A two-year project begun in February 1982, this study scrutinized district schools' attendance and dropout records, identified and interviewed actual dropouts, reviewed their school records for teacher comments regarding academic, health and behavioral characteristics, and then compared the dropout population with the

in-school population to build a profile of the "typical" dropout. The goal of the study was to use that information to design interventions to prevent school attrition and to bring dropouts back into the educational system. The results of the study include a well thought out, comprehensive set of 39 recommendations covering eight major areas:

- o early identification of potential dropouts;
- o staff/student relationships;
- o the teaching/learning process;
- o staff training;
- o educational alternatives;
- o curriculum;
- o graduation requirements; and
- o data management (pp. 55-61).

Although too numerous to describe in detail here, many of the recommendations are similar to those of other reports described above, such as caring, well-trained staff; diversified teaching methods and environments; competency-based, relevant curriculum that is individually paced; career exploration and vocational components; and flexible scheduling. However, the Edmonds recommendations stand apart from others we reviewed for their specificity and comprehensiveness. They also include more emphasis on the issues of school climate and the interpersonal relationships that are so important to effective schooling of all students, but particularly of at-risk students. Specific recommendations are made about the need to sensitize staff to deal with the whole student (regarding problems both in and out of school); evaluate staff based on teacher/student interaction; provide staff with time and resources to contact absentees, facilitate links to community

agencies, etc. The study's inclusion of recommendations for data management illustrates how seriously Gadwa and her associates took their charge to improve the district's services for all children.

At the state level in Washington, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) has been actively fostering dropout prevention activities on the local level. In 1984, the OSPI set aside $300,000 to fund 13 model dropout programs around the state as part of the High Motivation/School Retention Program. The programs are very diverse (see Washington Alternative Learning Association and Superintendent of Public Instruction High Motivation/School Retention Program Showcase Conference program descriptions, May 1986); they include special classes within the regular school framework and setting, an alternative school, mentoring, outreach (to truants and dropouts as well), transition programs, community service, skills remediation, personal development, counseling, and tutoring. Some are established programs and others are new endeavors. Dropout prevention strategies employed by many of these specially selected programs, as identified by the High Motivation/School Retention Program, include:

- counseling/survival skills;
- contract courses;
- small classes;
- tutoring;
- advocacy;
- transportation;
- child care;
- natural helpers; and
- continuous enrollment.

The OSPI has continued to fund dropout prevention programs through the High Motivation/School Retention Program. Building on initial program descriptions obtained at the Washington Alternative Learning Association's annual conference (May 1986), we plan to follow the progress of these model programs, paying particular attention to evidence of their effectiveness.

Also in Washington State, the Washington Roundtable, a group of corporate executive officers from 29 major firms doing business in the state sponsored a report on dropouts (Zobrist 1985). The author reviewed national and local studies on the topic, conducted interviews with school and community leaders around the state and made site visits. Based on his research and personal interviews, Zobrist cites the following major components of successful programs:

- a cohesive school community that generates a strong sense of affiliation -- student/staff bonding;
- choices -- the opportunity to choose school or program;
- multiple efforts to stimulate and challenge to engage and hold the student's interest;
- work designed so the student can experience frequent, real successes;
- curriculum/content that is germane and important to at-risk students;
- instructional methods that go beyond traditional approaches, such as action learning, small group and individual as well as whole class instruction, and cooperative, interdependent learning;
- developmental programs -- for students to become responsible members of a group and autonomous, self-directing adults, in addition to developing cognitive skills; and
- district support and backing which allows the program to depart from traditional procedures and practices (pp. 102-103).

Several studies have also been conducted in Oregon. The Oregon School Study Council (OSSC) has published a study on dropout prevention

programs that work (O'Connor 1985). Based on a review of the literature and interviews with district and secondary school administrators in Oregon, O'Connor identifies 10 characteristics of effective student retention programs:

- o early identification and prompt remedial assistance;
- o sound organization -- careful planning based on indepth knowledge of available community resources and the individual nature of student needs;
- o careful staff selection -- individuals with an empathetic and fearless regard for at-risk students;
- o team teaching and the "buddy system";
- o a unique or program-specific focus, with explicit, tangible expectations and goals;
- o students who have chosen this program and have made a commitment to participate;
- o a role valued by the main (regular) school with which the program is affiliated and adequate funds to perform its functions;
- o administrative flexibility with regard to student intake, budgeting, facilities, and supplies;
- o a high degree of community involvement, such as school-business partnerships; and
- o staff awareness of substance abuse and student awareness and assistance programs (pp. 7-13).

In Portland, a study to devise a comprehensive system for meeting the needs of at-risk youth has been underway for the past year: the Portland Leaders Roundtable Planning Project. It is a collaborative effort among several major city organizations: the Portland Public Schools, the Portland Urban League, the Private Industry Council, the City of Portland, the Youth Service Centers, and the Business Youth Exchange (an arm of the Chamber of Commerce). Together these diverse groups are working to establish a city-wide service system that will assist youth in and out of school to develop competence in basic skills and acquire the

necessary skills for finding and keeping a job. As reviewers for the Urban Network Project of Brandeis University point out, Portland has successfully built a city-wide coalition through the patient efforts of a creative and committed planning team (Cipollone & Farrar, 1985).

Four workgroups have spent the past year researching and discussing ways to improve the preparation of all children, but especially at-risk children, as they pass through the school system and join the ranks of working adults. The workgroups have been organized according to age and schooling categories: (1) preschool, grade 5, (2) middle school, grades 6-8, (3) in-school, grades 9-12, and (4) out-of-school, ages 14-21. These workgroups recently completed their recommendations and ideas for implementation to be included in the Leaders Roundtable Master Plan (Portland Leaders Roundtable Planning Project 1986). The following are the areas which these leaders consider in need of improvement or expansion to address adequately the needs of at-risk children at the middle school (grades 6-8) level in Portland:

- o basic skills learning;
- o positive relationships between parents and children;
- o overcoming racial bias;
- o assessment, identification of individual student needs, and appropriate follow-up procedures including counseling and guidance;
- o alternatives for at-risk youth;
- o training for teachers and scheduling (to accommodate working parents);
- o linkages between schools, support agencies and business;
- o coordination among programs within the school system; and
- o school district commitment to employability as an outcome for the school experience as well as the prevention of academic failure.

For at-risk youth in high school, the list is very similar:

- o school district commitment to employability as an outcome from high school for all students;
- o assessment, identification of individual student needs, and appropriate follow-up and guidance;
- o staff training;
- o alternatives for at-risk youth;
- o basic skills learning;
- o positive relationships between parents and school;
- o linkages between schools and other agencies;
- o school attendance policies and procedures; and
- o coordination among programs within the school system.

For youth ages 14-21 who are no longer in school, the following have been identified as service provision areas needing improvement, listed in order of priority:

- o linkages among service providers;
- o basic skills learning;
- o improving the jobs climate for youth;
- o support services (drug and alcohol education linked with housing, health, employment and training programs, services for teenage mothers);
- o assessment and identification of individual needs and appropriate follow-up;
- o vocational training/work experience;
- o overcoming employers' bias towards youth; and
- o training of staff in youth serving agencies to incorporate basic skills instruction.

Summary of Common Characteristics

The foregoing review illustrates the great variety of ways researchers and educators describe what makes a program work and the multitude of program attributes that are considered to contribute to success in serving at-risk youth. This review process, although tedious, is an essential step in establishing a firm foundation for our project's identification of truly "promising practices." Although direct relation of strategy to outcome is the preferred method of determining effectiveness, as noted our review of the literature found very few descriptions of such program evaluations and documentation. Due to inaccurate or incomplete methods of dropout documentation, which generally haven't been improved since the National Education Association published its report of ways to overcome the limitations of dropout data sources in 1965 (Hammack 1986:325), and due to insufficient resources to dedicate to systematic program evaluation, much of what is considered "effective" is based solely on program descriptions. Indeed, most of the major national reports described earlier in this paper have based their recommendations for dropout intervention on what practitioners say works.

Consulting the collective experience of teachers and administrators who work with high-risk youth is certainly one valid way to identify characteristics of successful programs. Practitioners who have dedicated years to working with children who are at risk of dropping out know what works for their students, even if their districts have not been able to conduct thorough evaluations. By looking for common threads among the many effective program reports, we have begun to formulate a list of characteristics that are very likely to foster success in dropout intervention efforts.

The effective program descriptions reviewed to date share the following common characteristics:

Staffing: Nearly every dropout prevention program requires qualified, caring teachers. The importance of the teacher's ability to establish rapport with individual at-risk students and develop personal relationships with them cannot be overstated.

Curriculum: Most agree that the curriculum should be relevant and meaningful for high-risk students, based on real-life experiences and goals. Many emphasize personal development; many others focus on preparation for work, incorporating basic skills remediation or other academic work as appropriate.

Methodology: Programs should be small, with low student/teacher ratio. There is almost universal agreement that instruction should be individualized, in terms of pace, ability and many say content. But some group work should also be included to teach appropriate group behavior and foster social bonding. Most note the need for students to experience success; for clear expectations and standards based on realistic (attainable) goals; immediate feedback and clear, valid criteria for evaluating performance; and consistent and appropriate rewards and sanctions.

Administrative support: Many programs cite the importance of having the support and commitment of the district or main school.

Initial Survey of Promising Practices in the Region

To begin to gather information on effective dropout prevention activities in the region, a brief questionnaire was distributed to all county and school superintendents and middle, junior high and high school principals in Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington (see Appendix A). Questionnaires were also sent to schools listed in the Oregon and Alaska alternative education directories and to participants in "Our Other Youth: Fifth Annual Conference on Dropout Prevention and Working with At-Risk Youth" in Portland in February 1986. A total of 2,984 questionnaires were distributed.

Those who received the questionnaire were asked to fill it out if they knew of effective learning strategies for working with

low-achieving, high-risk youth or if they were working with an effective strategy or program. They were also asked to copy the form and share it with other programs or teachers who are exceptionally skilled at helping at-risk students. (See letter in Appendix A.) Judging from the responses, many recipients of the original mailing apparently did distribute copies of the form. There is, therefore, no way to determine the response rate to this survey, nor was it our intention to do so. We expected only a portion of the survey recipients to be able to fill out the form. A blanket mailing was selected to ensure that the project could tap into as many promising, though perhaps as yet little known, strategies as possible.

The questionnaire was brief and simple. Our intention was to receive information from as many practitioners as possible as an initial step in exploring what the region's schools have to offer high-risk youth. Thus, the form had to be "doable" -- something that could be filled in quickly. But we also wanted information that would help us begin to discriminate among strategies. In addition to contact information (name, address, phone), we asked for program descriptions via forced categories and descriptors: source of funding, age level served, and main focus(es) of the program or strategy. To begin to address the issue of effectiveness, we also asked respondents to jot down three things they thought contributed to the success of the strategy/program being reported. (See questionnaire in Appendix A.)

The results of the survey are presented in Tables 1 - 4. Excluding multiple responses from the same program and responses from programs as yet in the planning stage, we have received 241 responses, over half of which were from individuals working at the high school level (see

Table 1). The mail-out distribution included approximately 50% more individuals at the high school level than at the middle and junior high levels. It is not surprising, then, that we have received a higher number of responses from the high school level. Whether or not this is also an indicator that teachers are actually doing more at the high school level to address the needs of at-risk students cannot be determined by this type of voluntary survey, of course. The literature, however, confirms what these data suggest. Calls for the need for early intervention and implementation of strategies for identifying and helping potential dropouts in the middle or elementary schools are a relatively recent phenomenon.

TABLE 1

Number of Respondents by Grade Level Served

Grade Level	Number
6 - 8	35
9 - 12	139
Mixed (6-8 & 9-12)	48
K - 12	10
Not Specified	9
TOTAL	241

Note: Excludes multiple responses from the same program and responses from programs in the planning stage.

A wide variety of programs and strategies are represented by the survey respondents. They range from specially targeted study hall classes to complete K-12 alternative school programs. Programs often reported multiple focuses, indicating recognition in many cases of the variety of needs at-risk youth have and the importance of providing an integrated program which enables teachers to deal with the whole child. These survey results do not warrant detailed analyses; their utility lies in the overview they provide of what practitioners in this field are doing and what they think is important. Nearly three-quarters of the programs described include improved basic skills as a main program focus. (See Table 2.) The next most frequently mentioned focus was personal growth and development (65%), followed by academic credit for graduation (53%), counseling/mentoring (52%), and specific subject mastery/competency (44%). Approximately a third of the programs reported an emphasis on employability skills training and one in five mentioned vocational training/employment as a main focus. Only 15% considered health care/family planning a main focus of their efforts. Other miscellaneous focuses mentioned include GED preparation, behavior modification and development of social skills, development of study skills, substance abuse counseling, teen parenting, and specific emphases on self-concept development, goal setting skills, and the like.

Looking at the focuses as reported by grade level served, the pattern of emphases does not vary much from that of the overall sample. As one might expect, academic credit is not yet an issue for middle schools, and employability skills and vocational training are more immediately relevant for high school students.

TABLE 2

Main Focuses of Programs Responding
by Grade Level Served (in Percent*)

Main Focus Area	Grade Level					
	6 - 8 n=35	9 - 12 n=139	Mixed 6-8 & 9-12 n=48	K - 12 n=10	Not Specified n=9	Total n=241
Basic skills	71	71	73	90	56	72
Subject mastery	46	45	44	30	22	44
Academic credit	3	66	56	50	22	53
Personal growth	71	66	56	60	67	65
Employability skills training	6	38	33	30	44	32
Vocational training/ employment	3	27	21	20	22	22
Counseling/ mentoring	51	55	48	60	22	52
Health care/ family planning	-	17	25	10	-	15
Other	17	19	25	20	22	20

*Percent is of total number of respondents within each grade level.

Note: Based on forced category selection. Multiple focuses could be indicated.

In response to the statement "I think this strategy/program is successful because: . . . ," respondents provided a "blizzard" of answers (as Mann would have said). Space for three reasons was provided. Most confined their responses to that format; however, some provided many more reasons, and others attached extensive program descriptions. In Tables 3 and 4 we have attempted to condense the responses regarding reasons for

success into several major categories: curriculum, methodology, staffing, counseling, parent involvement, administrative support, and community links. This represents an initial effort to determine the categories of strategy and program characteristics that are critical to successful dropout intervention efforts. However, it is far from being a definitive taxonomy of the characteristics of effective programs. As the project progresses, these categories will be subject to continuous review and revision.

It may be useful to consider these categories of responses in terms of the total number of reasons for success given. (See Table 3.) It is not surprising to find that the three major categories of practices to which respondents attribute program/strategy success are methodology, curriculum and staffing (in order of frequency mentioned). We must be careful not to extrapolate too much from these results, however. The fact that these categories (particularly curriculum and methodology) are very complex and include a wide variety of options most probably accounts for their more frequent mention here. Less frequent mention of administrative support, for example, as an ingredient of success does not necessarily mean that it is less important in constructing an effective program than a specific mode of delivery of instruction or a particular curricular focus. Nevertheless, frequency of mention may at least provide some indication of where respondents are focusing their energies. Examining patterns of frequency of response for these major categories by grade level served may give us some clues regarding age-related differences in emphasis. For example, for middle school dropout prevention efforts, methodological issues appear to be less of a concern than are staffing issues. By comparison, at the high school

level methodology appears to take on increasing importance. This may simply reflect the greater number of methodological options available for this age group due to greater attention to the "dropout problem." But it may also suggest a slightly different set of priorities. These possible interpretations will be tested in subsequent contacts with practitioners in interviews and site visits.

TABLE 3

Reasons for Strategy/Program Success
(in Percent*)

	Grade Level					
Reasons for Success	6 - 8	9 - 12	Mixed 6-8 & 9-12	K - 12	Not Specified	Total
	n=35	n=139	n=48	n=10	n=9	n=241
Curriculum	29	29	26	22	54	29
Methodology	20	36	38	30	38	34
Staffing	31	21	16	19	8	21
Counseling	4	4	7	22	-	6
Parent involvement	8	3	5	4	-	4
Administrative support	6	3	5	-	-	3
Community links	1	3	4	4	-	3
Total	99	99	101	101	101	100

*Percents may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Examining the results within the major reason categories is more useful because it allows us to see some of the more commonly favored techniques. Table 4 lists specific focuses or practices within the major groupings that were mentioned with enough frequency to make them stand out among the enormous variety of comments. In Table 4 we see the

TABLE 4

Reasons for Strategy/Program Success

Reasons for Success	Grade Level: 6 - 8	9 - 12	Mixed 6-8 & 9-12	K - 12	Not Specified	Total
	n=35	n=139	n=48	n=10	n=9	n=241
CURRICULUM	26	112	35	6	7	186
Academic	11	34	12	2	3	62
Personal development	12	50	21	3	2	88
Vocational	1	14	-	-	1	16
Real-life/relevant	2	14	2	1	1	20
METHODOLOGY	18	136	51	8	5	218
Individualization	3	46	18	-	2	69
Organizational aspects	12	60	24	6	3	105
Competency-based	-	10	1	1	-	12
Environmental aspects	3	20	8	1	-	32
STAFFING	28	82	22	5	1	138
Dedicated/qualified	9	30	10	2	-	51
Low teacher/ student ratio	10	24	6	1	1	42
Team/collaboration	6	17	5	-	-	28
Advocate/mentor	1	7	-	1	-	9
Peer tutors	2	4	1	1	-	8
COUNSELING	4	17	9	6	-	36
Individual	1	12	3	1	-	17
Group/peer support	3	3	4	2	-	12
Drug and alcohol	-	2	2	3	-	7
PARENT INVOLVEMENT	7	13	7	1	-	28
ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT	5	10	7	-	-	22
Support/involvement	4	3	2	-	-	9
Coordination with regular program	-	6	5	-	-	11
Funds	1	1	-	-	-	2
COMMUNITY LINKS	1	12	5	1	-	19
Community support	1	3	1	-	-	5
Agency collaboration	-	7	1	-	-	8
Other	-	2	3	1	-	6

Note: Multiple reasons were given by most respondents.

importance of a personal development curriculum, especially at the high school level. Offering an academic curriculum is also considered very important. With regard to methodololgy (instructional delivery), using methods which allow for individual attention, pace, learning style, or goals, for example, is commonly related to success. It appears to be about twice as popular for high school programs as it is for work with middle schoolers. Organizational aspects of methodology (such as competency-based, consistent rewards and sanctions, short terms, flexible hours, immediate feedback, integrated structure) are most frequently mentioned. They appear to be equally important at all levels.

Having a dedicated and qualified staff and a low teacher/student ratio are key characteristics.

Project Plans

The response to the survey has been encouraging. Respondents are anxious to share what they are doing and to learn from others. Many added extra notes commenting on the need for this type of project and expressing interest in the results. A few still in the planning process want to be included as the project progresses and want to be kept abreast of the types of practices identified.

In the coming months we will be refining the list of characteristics of promising practices which is emerging from our review of programs described in the literature and from the survey results and other contacts. The resulting list will be incorporated into a checklist of strategies and related outcomes that are common to programs serving at-risk youth. This will be used as we conduct interviews with staff of

specific programs in the region, select programs for on-site observations and conduct those site visits in the fall.

We will also convene a meeting of regional and local educational leaders (from both traditional and alternative education associations, state and district levels) to discuss the project and plans for dissemination. A process will be designed to disseminate information about effective educational alternatives for at-risk youth at state, district and local levels.

Increased awareness of successful alternative strategies in use in the region should stimulate self evaluations by schools who want to improve the ways they address the needs of their marginal students. To guide them as they plan programs for youth at risk of dropping out, we will develop a needs assessment instrument. The common characteristics checklist will greatly facilitate the development of this instrument, since a clear understanding of what works and in which settings is necessary to any evaluation of existing programs and services.

As a result of this year's search for characteristics of successful dropout prevention efforts in the region, detailed profiles of effective strategies and programs throughout the Northwest region will be compiled for dissemination by the project next year as originally planned.

References

Batsche, Catherine, et al. (1984, June). Indicators of effective programming for school to work transition skills among dropouts. Normal: Illinois State University. (ERIC ED 246 235)

Beck, Lisa, & Muia, Joseph A. (1980). A portrait of a tragedy: Research findings on the dropout. The High School Journal, 64(2), 65-72.

Cardenas, Jose, & First, Joan McCarty. (1985, September). Children at risk. Educational Leadership, 43(1), 4-9.

CETA--Education Linkage Unit. (1981, March). Secondary school dropouts. St. Paul, MN: MN Department of Education.

Cipollone, Anthony, & Farrar, Eleanor. (1985, May 17) The Urban Network Project: A look at collaboration in three cities (Revised September 9, 1985). Report prepared for the Center for Human Resources, Brandeis University. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.

Council of Great City Schools. (1985). Final report for the Council of Great City Schools: Secondary schools improvement study. Washington, DC.

Dropouts: Shocking enough to get our attention? (1985). Trends & Learning, (9), 1-4.

Education Commission of the States Business Advisory Commission. (1985). Reconnecting youth: The next stage of reform. Denver: ECS Distribution Center.

Ekstrom, Ruth B., Goertz, Margaret B., Pollack, Judith M., & Rock, Donald A. (1986, Spring). Who drops out of high school and why? Findings from a national study. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 356-373.

Fine, Michelle. (1986, Spring). Why urban adolescents drop into and out of public high school. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 393-409.

Gadwa, Karol, Christenson, John, Bryan, Elizabeth, & Boeck, Debora. (1983, June). School dropout study: A final report. Lynnwood, WA: Edmonds School District, Student Services Department.

Hamilton, Stephen F. (1986, Spring). Raising standards and reducing dropout rates. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 410-29.

Hammack, Floyd Morgan. (1986, Spring). Large school systems' dropout reports: An analysis of definitions, procedures, and findings. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 324-41.

Hodgkinson, Harold L. (1985). All one system: Demographics of education, kindergarten through graduate school. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership, Inc.

Lotto, L. S. (1982). The holding power of vocational curriculua: Characteristics of effective dropout prevention programs. Journal of Vocational Educational Research, 7(4), 39-49.

Mann, Dale. (1986). Dropout prevention: Getting serious about programs that work. NASSP Bulletin, 70(489), 66-73. (a)

Mann, Dale. (1986, Spring). Can we help dropouts: Thinking about the undoable. Teachers College Record, 87(3), 307-23. (b)

McDill, Edward L., Natriello, Gary, & Pallas, Aaron. (1986, February). A population at risk: Potential consequences of tougher school standards for student droupouts. American Journal of Education, 94(2), 135-181.

MDC, Inc. (1985). The states' excellence in education commissions: Who's looking out for at-risk youth. Prepared for the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation. Chapel Hill, NC: Author.

National Coalition of Advocates for Students. (1986, March). Barriers to excellence: Our children at risk. Boston, MD: Author.

National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office (Stock No. 065-000-00177-2).

National Governors' Association. (1985). The five-year dilemma. Washington, DC: Author.

Neill, Shirley Boes (Ed.). (1979). Keeping students in school, problems and solutions (AASA Critical Issues Report). American Association of School Administrators.

New York City Public Schools. (1979, October 16). The dropout report. Brooklyn, NY: Board of Education, City of New York.

O'Connor, Patrick. (1985, December). Dropout prevention programs that work. OSSC Bulletin, 29(4).

Ohio State Department of Education. (1983). Reducing dropouts in Ohio schools: Guidelines and promising practices, A guide to dropout prevention, intervention and remediation. (ERIC ED 262 316)

Oregon Department of Education. (1980). Oregon early school leavers study. Salem, OR: Author.

Peng, Samuel S., & Takai, Ricky T. (1983, November). High school dropouts: Descriptive information from High School and Beyond. National Center for Education Statistics Bulletin, 1-9.

Portland Leaders Roundtable Planning Project. (1986, April 16). Working papers: Detailed version -- ingredients of a comprehensive system for at-risk youth, Workgroups #2, 3, & 4. Portland, OR.

Rumberger, Russell W. (1983). Dropping out of high school: The influence of race, sex, and family background. American Educational Research Journal, 20(2), 199-200.

Schellenberg, Steven J. (1985, March). Patterns of graduation and dropping out in the Class of '84, District 4J. A report presented to Assistant Superintendent Bob Stalick and Director of Secondary Education Ted Calhoun. Eugene Public Schools, Eugene, OR.

Sexton, Porter. (1985, Summer). Trying to make it real compared to what? Implications of high school dropout statistics. Journal of Educational Equity and Leadership, 5(2), 92-106.

Washington Alternative Learning Association and Superintendent of Public Instruction. (1986, May). Program descriptions prepared for the High Motivation/School Retention Program Showcase Conference, Everett, WA.

Weber, James E., & Silvani-Lacey, Cindy. (1983). Building basic skills: The dropout (Research & Development Series No. 236). Columbus, OH: National Center for Research in Vocational Education. (ERIC CE 036 465)

Wehlage, Gary G. (1983). Effective programs for the marginal high school student. Fastback 197. (ERIC ED 235 132)

Wehlage, Gary G., & Rutter, Robert A. (1986, Spring). Dropping out: How much do schools contribute to the problem? Teachers College Record, 87(3), 374-92. (a)

Wehlage, Gary G., & Rutter, Robert A. (1986). Evaluation of a model program for at-risk students. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco. (b)

Zobrist, Lee D. (1985, June.) Dropouts. Washington Roundtable Education Study. Seattle, WA.: Washington Roundtable.

APPENDIX A

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

300 S.W. Sixth Avenue • Portland, Oregon 97204 • (503) 248-6800
TELEX: 701716 CABLE: NWREL SOURCE: STLØ58

April 16, 1986

Dear Colleague:

The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory is conducting a federally funded project to identify teaching strategies and/or programs that successfully address the needs of middle school and high school students who are at risk of dropping out of school. We are writing to you to request information about strategies or programs which might serve as examples for administrators and teachers interested in improving the education of their at-risk students.

If you know of effective learning strategies for working with low-achieving, high-risk youth, or if you are working in an effective dropout prevention program, please fill out the attached information sheet and return it to us by April 30th. Your expertise may benefit others who are committed to solving the urgent needs of the many students who are at risk of becoming school dropouts.

If you know of successful programs or teachers who are exceptionally skilled at helping high-risk students, please be sure to distribute this letter and the accompanying form to them so their experience may be included.

The information you provide will be used to identify characteristics common to effective alternative education programs and strategies. Programs may be contacted by telephone for further details and some programs may be selected for onsite discussions and observation. This information on promising strategies will then be compiled and disseminated to help administrators and practitioners tailor school improvement efforts to meet the needs of middle and high school students who are not succeeding in the regular school curricula.

Thank you for your help. If you have any questions about this project, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Andrea Baker Karen Reed Green

Andrea Baker Karen Reed Green
Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth

AB/KRG:d
Enclosure

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR HIGH-RISK YOUTH

Please provide the following information for each effective educational strategy or program designed for low-achieving, high-risk middle or high school students.

Name of program and/or school: _____

Contact person: _____ Title: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: ( ) _____

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION (Check all that apply.)

Source of Funding

- ☐ Public
- ☐ Private

Age Level

- ☐ Grades 6 - 8
- ☐ Grades 9 - 12
- ☐ Other: _____

Main Focus

- ☐ Improved basic skills
- ☐ Specific subject mastery/competency
- ☐ Academic credit for graduation
- ☐ Personal growth and development
- ☐ Employability skills training
- ☐ Vocational training/ employment
- ☐ Counseling/mentoring
- ☐ Health care/family planning
- ☐ Other: _____

I think this strategy/program is successful because:

(1) _____

(2) _____

(3) _____

PLEASE RETURN BY APRIL 30 TO:

Karen Reed Green
Promising Practices for High-Risk Youth
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
300 S.W. Sixth Avenue
Portland, OR 97204
(503)248-6800, ext. 362